

No. 1524

14p

Commando

WAR STORIES IN PICTURES



SUICIDE STRIKE



Stars of Golf—Hubert Green

Suicide STRIKE



First published 1971



APRIL, 1940. THE NAZI HORDES WERE SWEEPING INTO NORWAY. A SQUADRON OF BLACKBURN SKUA DIVE BOMBERS SPED ACROSS THE NORTH SEA TO HELP THE NORWEGIANS.

A GERMAN LIGHT CRUISER HAD BEEN SPOTTED NEAR THE MAZE OF ISLANDS OUTSIDE BERGEN. THIS WAS THE SKUAS' TARGET. THEY HAD COME FROM SCAPA FLOW, AND WOULD BE AT THE EXTENT OF THEIR RANGE.

EAGER FOR THE COMING ACTION WAS SUB-LIEUTENANT RICK LENNOX. FRESH FROM HIS PILOT'S TRAINING, RICK HAD ONLY JOINED THE SQUADRON THE PREVIOUS DAY, BUT THIS DESPERATE SITUATION CALLED FOR EVERY AVAILABLE AIRCRAFT.



FLYING AS HIS OBSERVER/GUNNER WAS PETTY OFFICER FLETCHER MARTIN, ONE OF THE MOST EXPERIENCED MEMBERS OF THE SQUADRON.

WITH RICK'S INEXPERIENCE IN MIND, THE SQUADRON COMMANDER, LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER ERIC NOLAN, WAS KEEPING A SPECIAL EYE ON HIM. NOLAN'S INSTRUCTIONS HAD BEEN BRIEF AND TO THE POINT.



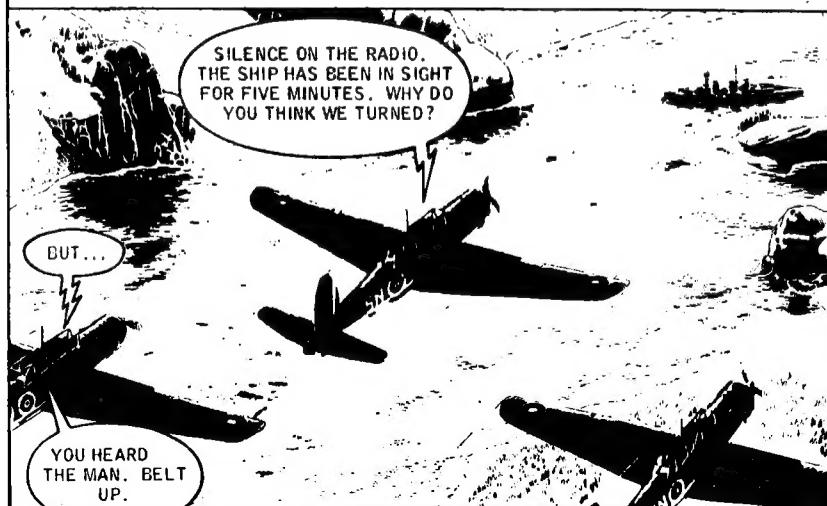
AS THEY REACHED THE NORWEGIAN COAST, NOLAN LED HIS MEN AWAY FROM THE FIRST FJORD.



SUPREMELY CONFIDENT OF HIS OWN ABILITY, RICK WAS READY TO TAKE ON THE GERMAN AIR FORCE AND NAVY SINGLE-HANDED. HE WAS A GOOD PILOT. THE TROUBLE WAS HE KNEW IT.



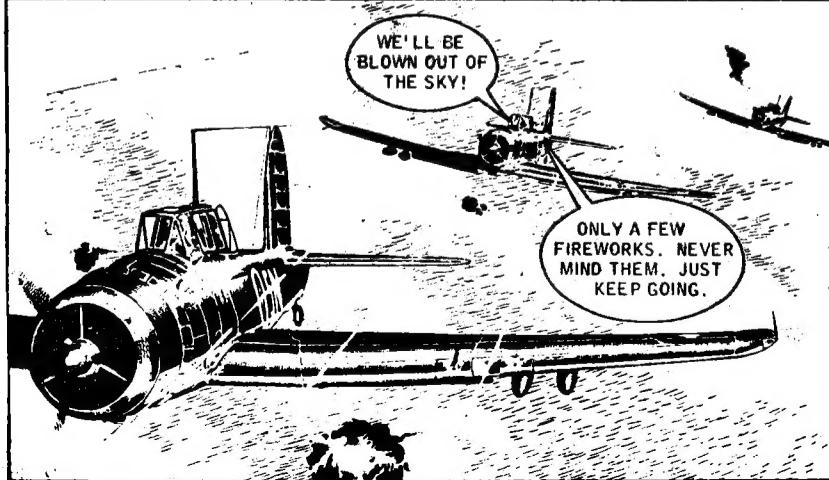
NOLAN'S LEVEL VOICE CUT ACROSS RICK'S EXCITED CHATTER LIKE A WHIP-LASH.



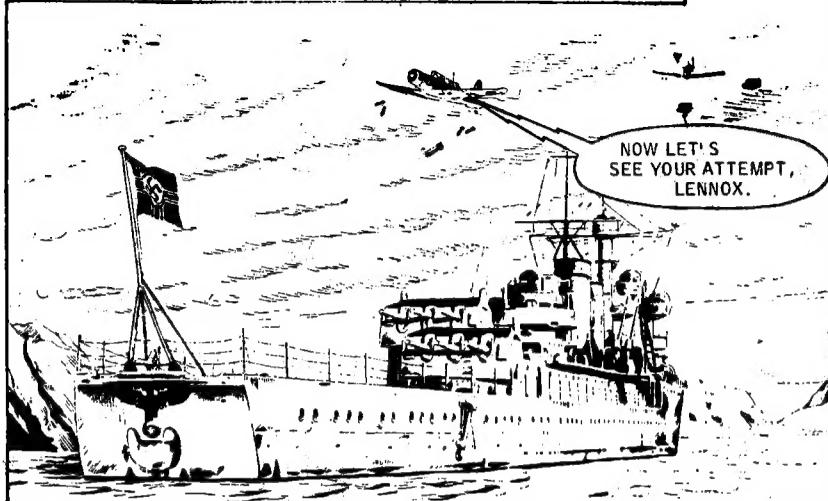
NOLAN KNEW WHAT HE WAS DOING. HE WAS KEEPING TO THE DARKNESS IN THE WEST TO AVOID BEING SPOTTED UNTIL THE VERY LAST MINUTE. THE SKUAS CLIMBED TO BOMBING HEIGHT.



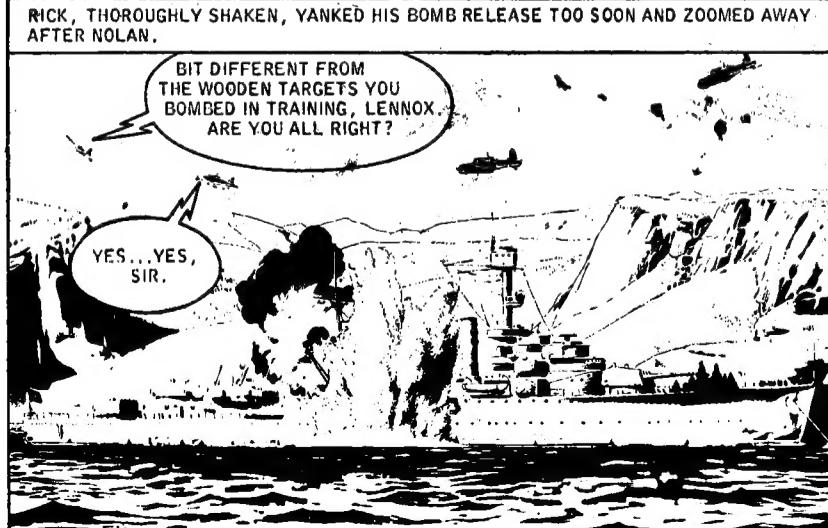
THOUGH CAUGHT UNAWARES, THE GERMAN CREW REACTED SWIFTLY WITH ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE. RICK NEARLY JUMPED OUT OF HIS SKIN AS TRACER SNARLED PAST HIS COCKPIT.



NOLAN LED THE ATTACK, LETTING HIS BOMBS GO AT THE LAST MINUTE.

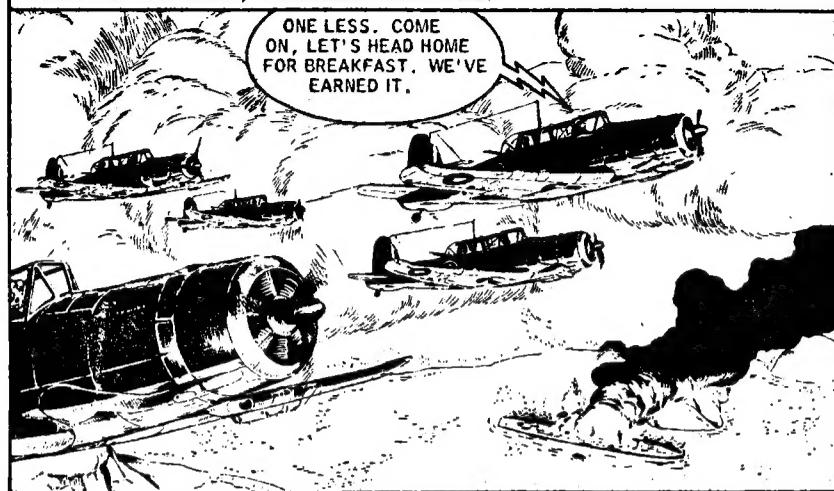


RICK, THOROUGHLY SHAKEN, YANKED HIS BOMB RELEASE TOO SOON AND ZOOMED AWAY AFTER NOLAN.



BUT FAR BELOW, ARMOUR-PIERCING BOMBS RIPPED THROUGH THE CRUISER'S PLATING, BURSTING DEEP INSIDE, TEARING OUT HER VITALS.

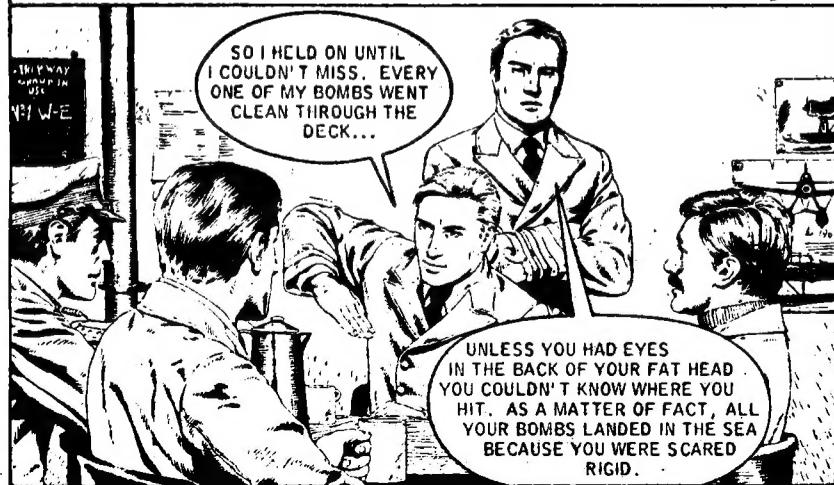
ONE LESS. COME ON, LET'S HEAD HOME FOR BREAKFAST. WE'VE EARNED IT.



LATER, IN THE WARDROOM, RICK LOST NO TIME IN TELLING OF HIS PART IN THE SUCCESSFUL OPERATION TO THE NON-FLYING OFFICERS. BUT NOLAN WAS IN EARSHOT.

SO I HELD ON UNTIL I COULDN'T MISS. EVERY ONE OF MY BOMBS WENT CLEAN THROUGH THE DECK...

UNLESS YOU HAD EYES IN THE BACK OF YOUR FAT HEAD YOU COULDN'T KNOW WHERE YOU HIT. AS A MATTER OF FACT, ALL YOUR BOMBS LANDED IN THE SEA BECAUSE YOU WERE SCARED RIGID.



FLUSHING WITH ANGER, RICK SWUNG ROUND TO MEET NOLAN'S ICY STARE.



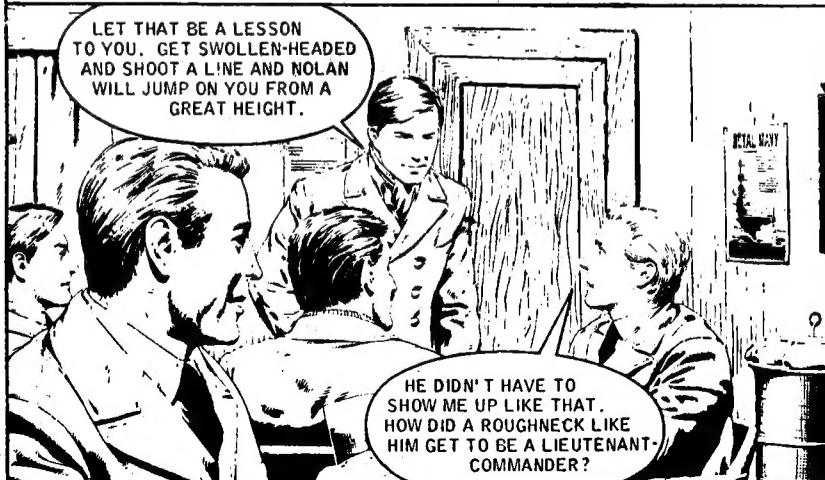
MY OBSERVER AND PETTY OFFICER MARTIN CONFIRMED IT. WE COULD HARDLY MISS, BUT YOU MISSED BY A MILE.

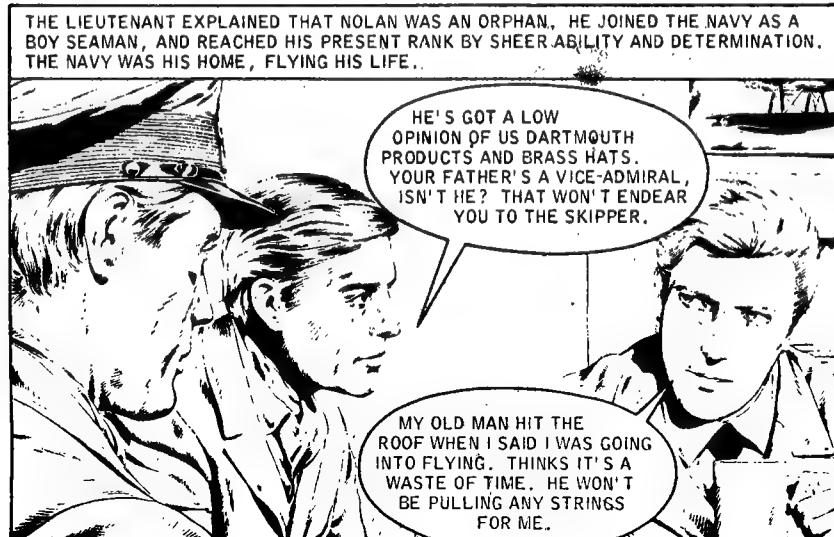
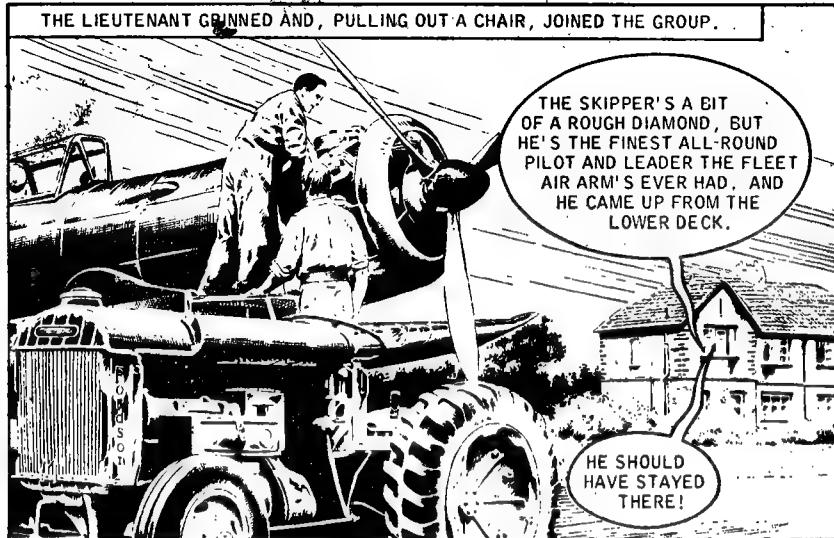
SEEING THE DERISIVE GRINS ON THE OTHERS' FACES, RICK TRIED TO WRIGGLE OUT OF THE EMBARRASSING SITUATION.



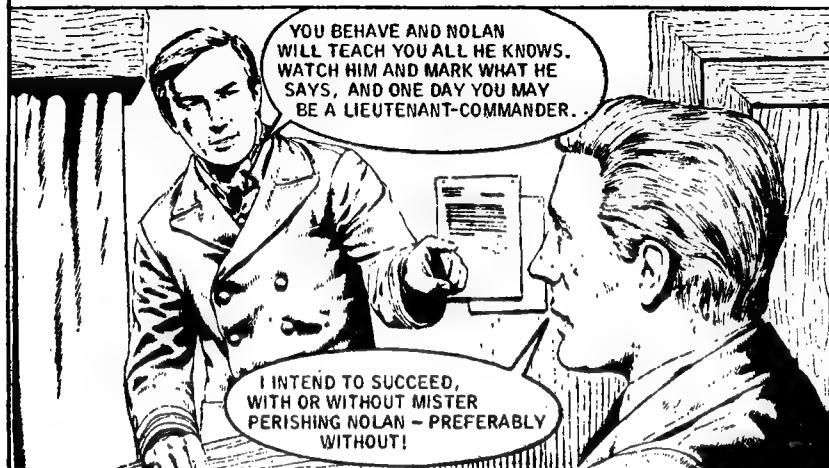
NOLAN TURNED ON HIS HEEL AND STRODE AWAY, LEAVING RICK FUMING UNDER THE CONTEMPTUOUS EYES OF THE OTHER YOUNG OFFICERS.

LET THAT BE A LESSON TO YOU, GET SWOLLEN-HEADED AND SHOOT A LINE AND NOLAN WILL JUMP ON YOU FROM A GREAT HEIGHT.





IN FACT, ADMIRAL LENNOX HAD ARRANGED FOR HIS SON TO BE POSTED TO NOLAN'S SQUADRON, HOPING THAT A TASTE OF STERN DISCIPLINE WOULD KNOCK SOME OF THE COCKINESS OUT OF HIM.



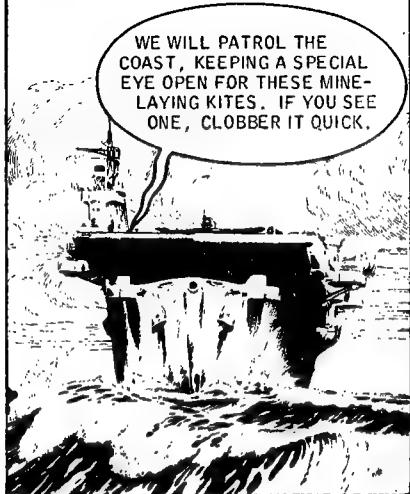
FOR THEIR NEXT OPERATION, THE SKUA SQUADRON EMBARKED ABOARD AN AIRCRAFT CARRIER WHICH SAILED FOR NORWAY.



ONLY FIGHTERS AND STUKAS WERE IN ACTION OVER NORWAY, BUT FLYING BOATS WERE SOWING MINES ALONG THE COASTAL SHIPPING ROUTES AND CAUSING CHAOS.

SO NEXT DAY NOLAN BRIEFED HIS CREW -

WE WILL PATROL THE COAST, KEEPING A SPECIAL EYE OPEN FOR THESE MINE-LAYING KITES. IF YOU SEE ONE, CLOBBER IT QUICK.



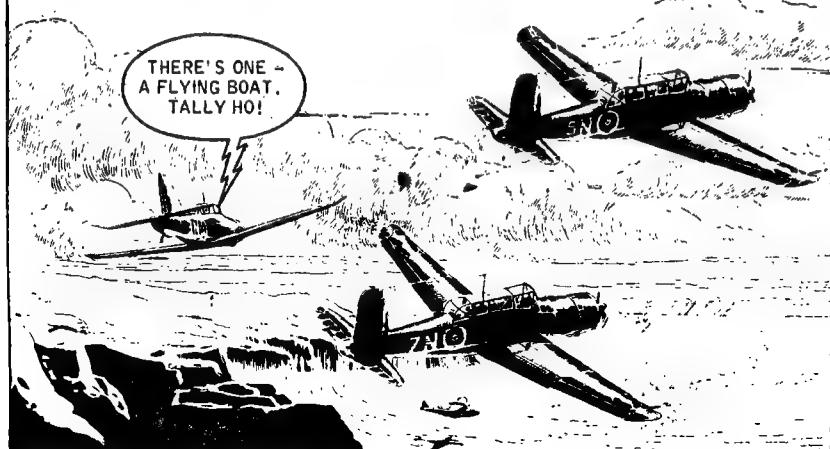
AND NOLAN ORDERED RICK TO FLY WITH HIM. HE STILL WANTED THIS IMPETUOUS FLEDGLING UNDER HIS EYE.

NOTHING HERE.
TIME TO TURN
BACK.

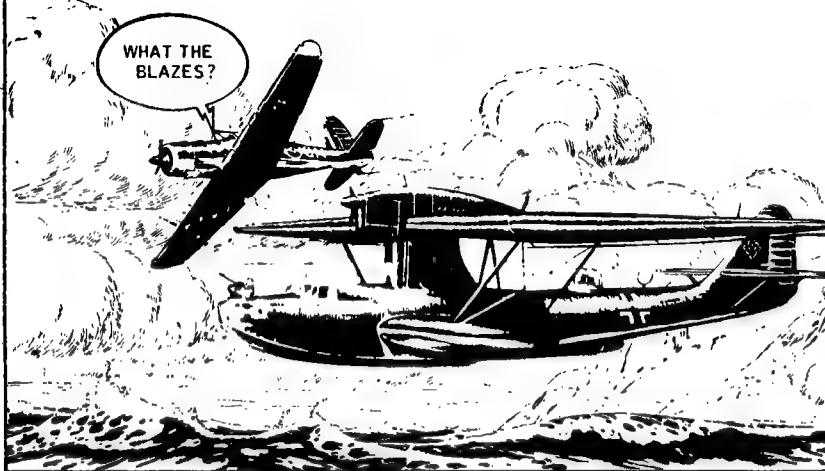


AS THE FLIGHT WHEELED IN FORMATION, RICK BANKED AWAY AS HE SPOTTED A BLACK SHAPE SKIMMING THE WAVES BEYOND THE TOWERING HEADLAND.

THERE'S ONE -
A FLYING BOAT.
TALLY HO!



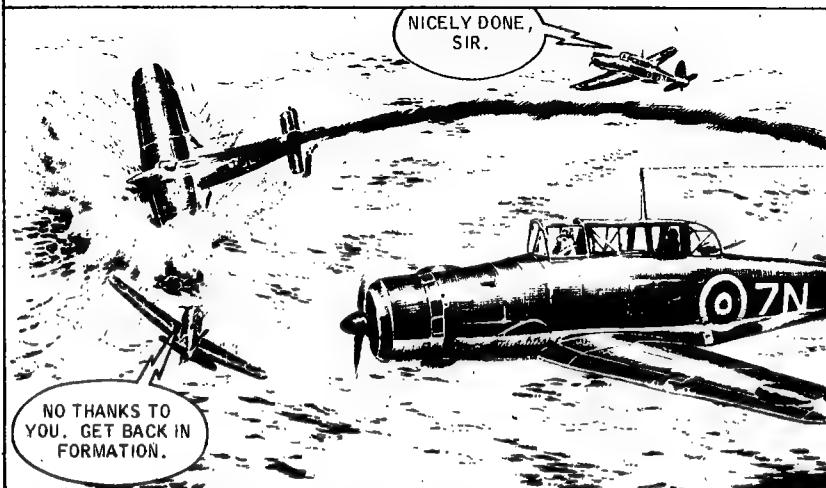
EAGERLY RICK ROARED DOWN ON THE BIG SEAPLANE. BUT THE DORNIER MOUNTED A CANNON IN THE MIDSHIP TURRET WHICH FAR OUTRANGED THE SKUA'S MACHINE GUNS.



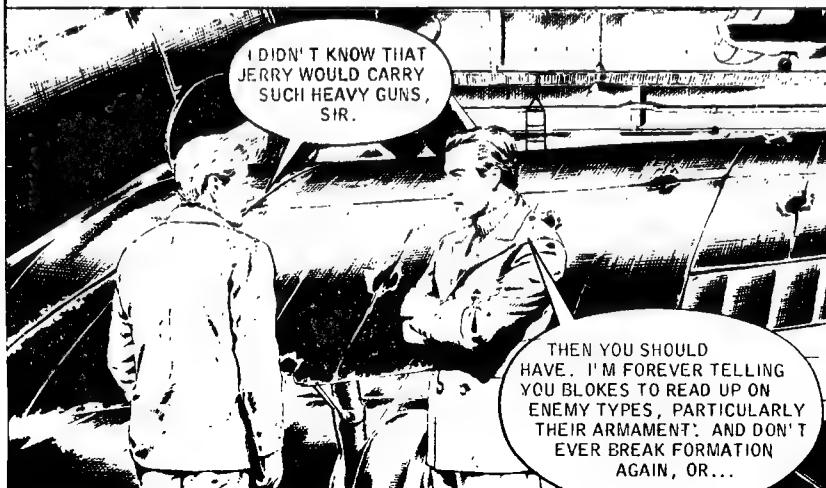
RICK ZOOMED WILDLY TO AVOID THE CANNON SHELLS PUNCHING HOLES IN HIS WINGS, ONLY TO BE WELL PEPPERED BY THE WAITING BOW GUNNER.



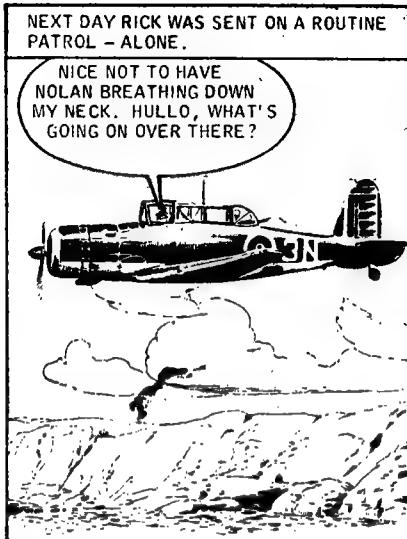
WITH THE THIRD MEMBER OF THE FLIGHT KEEPING WATCH ABOVE, NOLAN RACED IN AND SNAPPED OFF A TELLING BURST WHICH SETTLED FOR THE SEAPLANE.



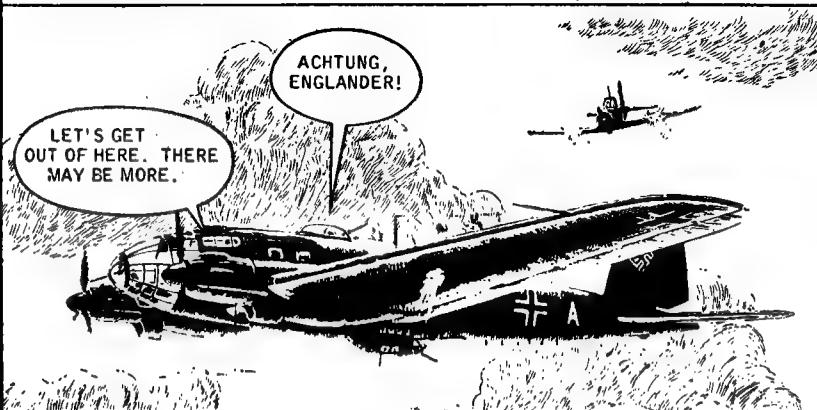
BACK AT THE CARRIER, RICK RUEFULLY EYED THE GAPPING HOLES TORN BY THE DORNIER'S CANNON AND BLESSED THE SKUA'S STAUNCH FRAME.







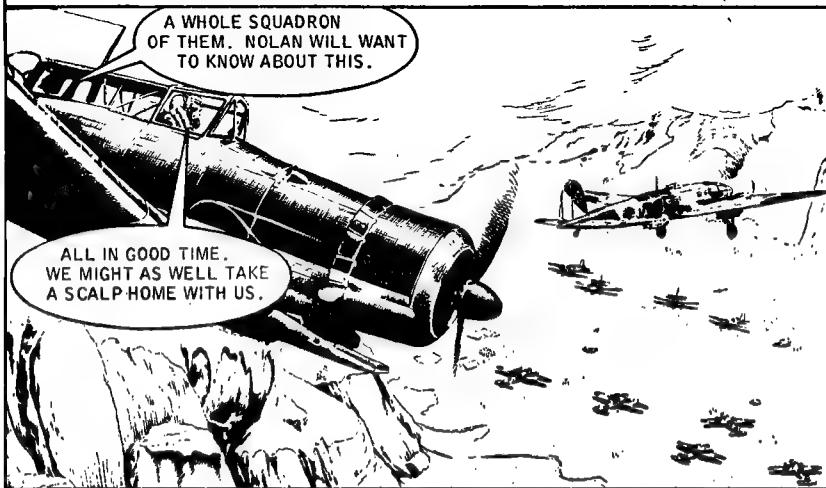
THE GERMANS WERE HAVING A HIGH OLD TIME AGAINST MEN WHO ONLY HAD RIFLES TO DEFEND THEMSELVES. THEY GOT A NASTY SHOCK WHEN BULLETS SLAMMED INTO THEIR MACHINE FROM ABOVE.



NOT LIKING THE ROUGH WAY THE OTHER AIRCRAFT PLAYED, THE HEINKEL FLED. RICK GRINNED DOWN AT THE WAVING NORWEGIANS. AT LAST SOMEBODY APPRECIATED HIS EFFORTS.



USING CLOUD COVER, RICK REMAINED UNDETECTED AS THE BOMBER PICKED ITS WAY AMONG THE PEAKS. HE TENSED AS THE HEINKEL FINALLY REACHED ITS BASE.



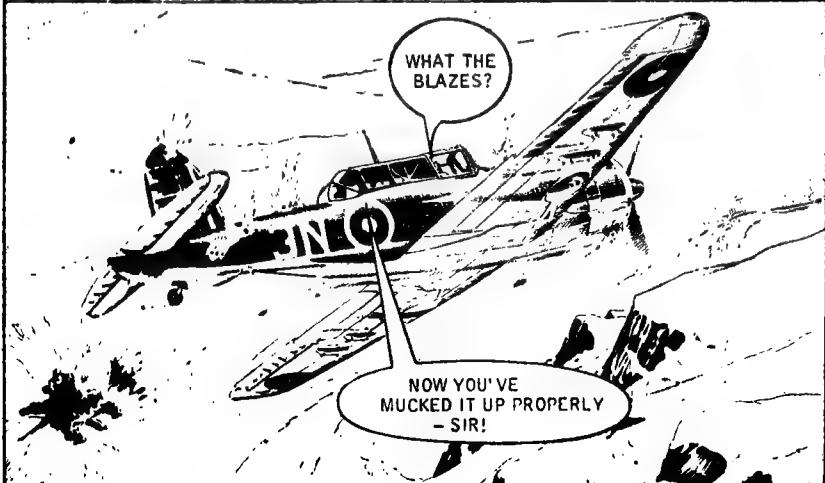
IGNORING MARTIN'S OBJECTIONS, RICK WATCHED THE HEINKEL COMPLETE ITS LANDING CIRCUIT. AS IT STEADIED FOR FINAL TOUCHDOWN, HE STRUCK.



RICK CHEERED AS THE HEINKEL SWERVED. A WING TIP TORE INTO THE GROUND AND THE BIG MACHINE SMASHED OVER ON TO ITS BACK.



EXULTATION TURNED TO HORROR AS THE GERMAN FLAK GUNNERS RAKED THE SKUA FROM NOSE TO TAIL AS IT THUNDERED OVERHEAD.



ENGINE MISFIRING, RICK STRUGGLED CLEAR OF THE GERMAN AIRFIELD. BELOW STRETCHED RAGGED ROCKS.

JUST THE PLACE FOR A FORCED LANDING.

STOP MOANING,
I'LL GET YOU BACK.

BUT THE BATTERED SKUA STEADILY LOST HEIGHT AS THE ENGINE BEGAN TO VIBRATE HORRIBLY.

I'LL HAVE TO LAND
ON THAT FROZEN LAKE. HOPE
THE ICE IS THICK ENOUGH.

FIGURES OF NORWEGIAN SOLDIERS APPEARED AT THE EDGE OF THE LAKE AS THE SKUA SLAMMED DOWN ON THE THICK ICE.

WHAT ARE THEY SO EXCITED ABOUT? FUNNY,
I CAN STILL HEAR ENGINES.

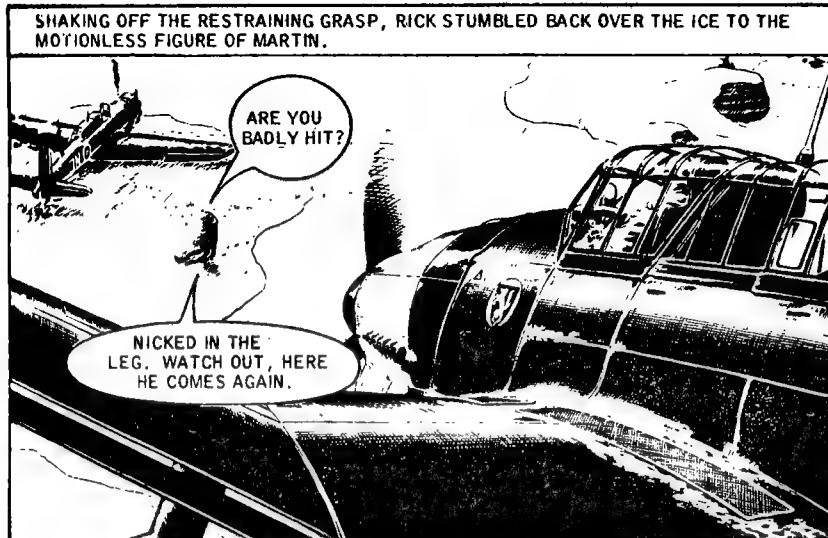
TOO RIGHT YOU CAN. LOOK BACK THERE
- STUKAS!

RICK SHOT OUT OF THE COCKPIT AS IF HE'D BEEN STUNG. AS HE SLIPPED AND SLITHERED ACROSS THE ICE HE HEARD THE EAR-PIERCING, NERVE-SHATTERING BANSHEE SCREAM OF THE DIVING STUKAS.



EVEN AS STRONG HANDS GRABBED HIM AND DRAGGED HIM TO COVER, RICK HEARD THE CHATTER OF MACHINE GUNS.





BULLETS SNARLING ROUND HIM LIKE ANGRY HORNETS, THE ICE QUIVERING FROM THE CONCUSSION OF THE BOMBS, RICK DRAGGED HIS GUNNER TO SAFETY. THE DIVE-BOMBERS ATTACKED THEM FOR A FEW MORE MINUTES, THEN LEFT.



MARTIN'S WOUND WAS MORE MESSY THAN SERIOUS, BUT NOW RICK HAD ANOTHER PROBLEM.

HOW DO WE GET BACK TO THE SHIP?

WE WILL NOTIFY YOUR ARMY, AND THEY CAN PASS A MESSAGE TO YOUR SHIP.



A DAY LATER A WALRUS AMPHIBIAN CAME TO FETCH THEM.

DID MY REPORT ABOUT THE AIRFIELD GET THROUGH?



YES, AND THE SKIPPER'S FLAMING. REPORT TO HIM AS SOON AS YOU GET ABOARD.

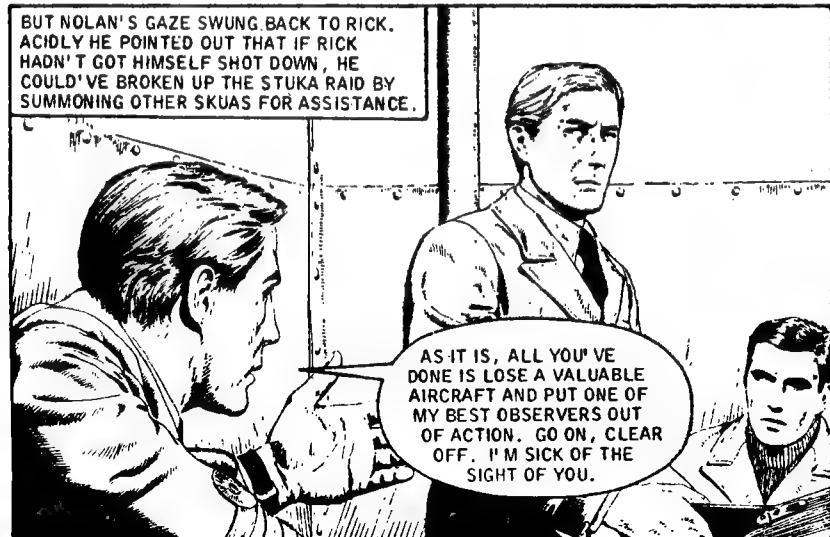
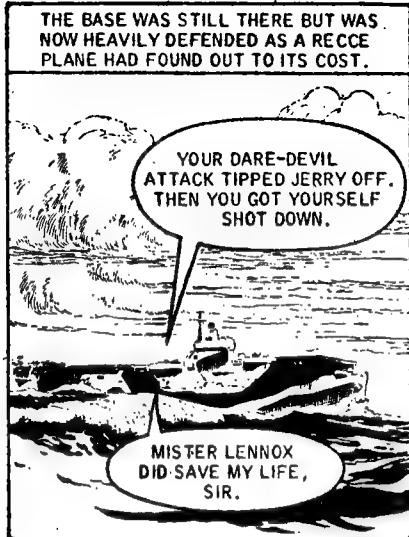
RICK WAS PUZZLED. THE PREVIOUS DAY HE HAD MADE OUT A REPORT GIVING THE LOCATION OF THE ENEMY AIRFIELD AND, OF COURSE, STATING HIS CLAIM FOR ONE HEINKEL DESTROYED.

WHAT'S WRONG, SIR?

JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING FROM START TO FINISH. SHADOWING THAT JERRY BACK TO THE AIRFIELD WAS OK. YOU ACTUALLY USED YOUR HEAD FOR ONCE. BUT AFTER THAT...

BUT HE WAS A SITTING DUCK, SIR. I JUST COULDN'T...





RICK BIT BACK THE HEATED RETORT THAT ROSE TO HIS LIPS AND HELPED MARTIN OUT OF THE CABIN. THERE HIS RESENTMENT BOILED OVER.



BUT THERE WAS LITTLE TIME TO THINK. THE BRITISH TROOPS WERE NOW BEING EVACUATED FROM NORWAY AND THE SKUAS PROVIDED AIR COVER.



RICK GRINNED SAVAGELY AS HE PUSHED HIS SKUA'S NOSE DOWN. NOW HE WOULD GIVE THE ENEMY A TASTE OF THEIR OWN MEDICINE.



THE GERMANS SCATTERED WILDLY AND COWERED AMONG THE ROCKS WHILE THE SKUAS RAGED OVER THEM.



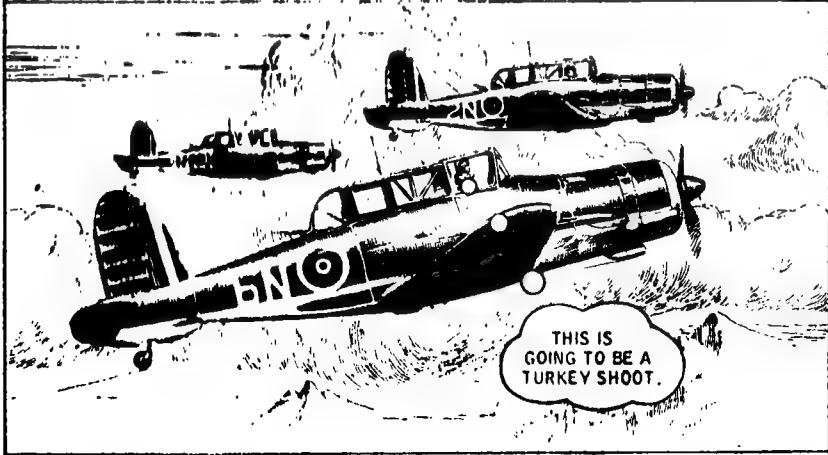
THE REARGUARD GLEEFULLY PELTED THROUGH THE TOWN TO BOARD THE LAST DESTROYER. BUT -



IT WAS A FULL SQUADRON OF STUKAS, INTENT ON SINKING THE DESTROYERS. BUT LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER NOLAN HAD OTHER IDEAS.

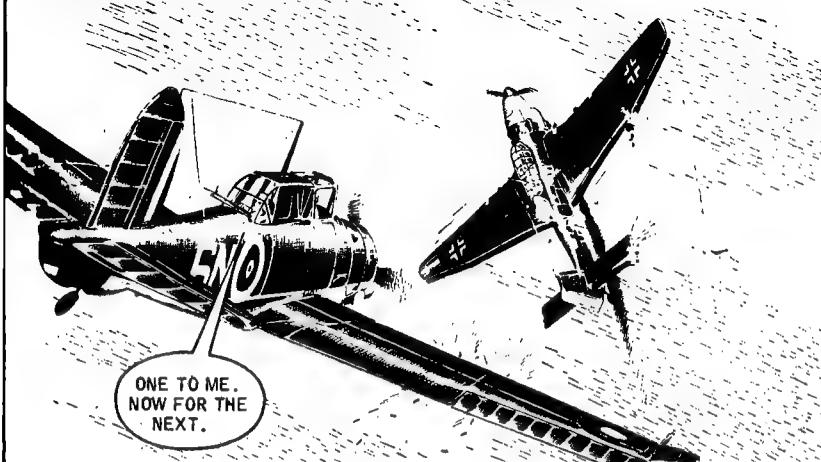


RICK HAD BEEN HAVING THE TIME OF HIS LIFE AND HIS BLOOD WAS UP. NOW HE WOULD REALLY SHOW NOLAN WHAT HE COULD DO.



IN PLACE OF MARTIN, RICK HAD A YOUNG, UNTRIED OBSERVER CALLED JAMESON.

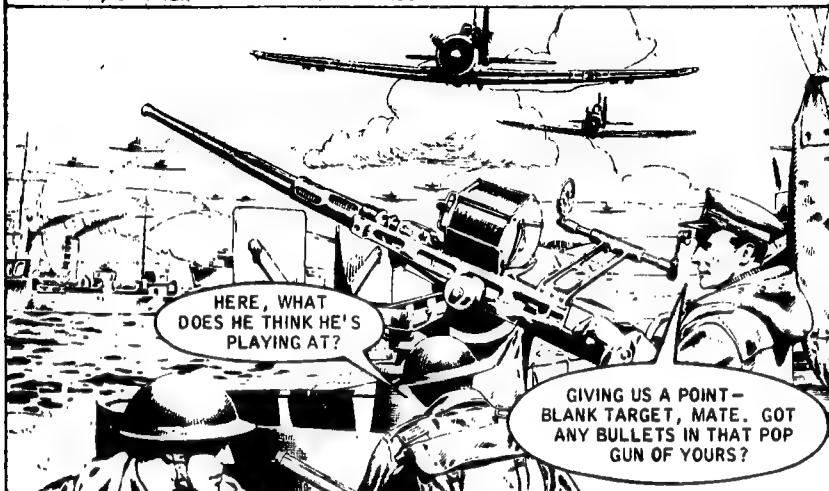
THE TWO FORMATIONS CLASHED. WHAT FOLLOWED COULD NOT BE CALLED A WHIRLWIND MILLE, FOR NEITHER SKUA NOR STUKA WAS INTENDED FOR DOGFIGHTING. BUT BOTH SIDES FOUGHT SAVAGELY.



THE LIGHTER AND BETTER-ARMED SKUAS SOON GAINED THE UPPER HAND. THE STUKAS HAD AN EDGE OF SPEED WHICH THEY SOON PUT TO GOOD USE BY FLEEING INLAND, JUST AS MORE TROUBLE APPEARED.



AS THE MESSERSCHMITTS SWOOPED, NOLAN LED HIS MEN OUT TO SEA AT MASTHEAD HEIGHT, STRAIGHT FOR THE DESTROYERS.



THE NAVY GUNNERS AND EVERY SOLDIER WITH A BULLET LEFT IN HIS RIFLE OPENED UP AT THE NAZI AIRCRAFT.



111 SQUADRON SPED AWAY SEAWARD EXCEPT FOR RICK WHO WHEN THE RECALL CAME WAS
MILL'S INLAND, PURSUING A STUKA THAT STUBBORNLY REFUSED TO GO DOWN.

LEAVE HIM BE,
SIR. WE MUST GET BACK
TO THE COAST.

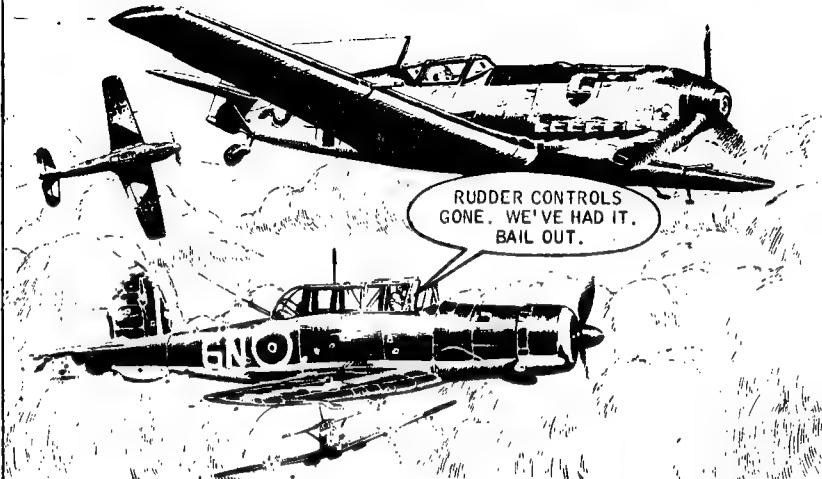
NOT UNTIL I'VE
POLISHED THIS BLIGHTER
OFF.

AT THAT MOMENT THE STUKA'S ENGINE SEIZED SOLID, AND IT CRASHED ON THE CRUEL
ROCKS BELOW. THOROUGHLY PLEASED, RICK HEADED FOR THE COAST, BUT HIS GLEE
QUICKLY EVAPORATED.

WHERE ARE THE
OTHERS? THEY CAN'T
HAVE GONE.

BUT THEY HAVE. AND
LOOK AT THIS MOB COMING.
THEY'RE OUT FOR BLOOD –
OURS!

BOILING MAD AT THE TRAP THEY HAD BEEN TRICKED INTO, THE MESSERSCHMITTS FELL ON THE LONE SKUA LIKE A PACK OF RAVENING WOLVES.



THEY JUMPED INTO THE ARMS OF ANGRY GERMAN SOLDIERS THEY HAD ATTACKED A SHORT WHILE BEFORE.



NICK AND HIS OBSERVER MIGHT HAVE SUFFERED SERIOUS INJURY HAD NOT A GERMAN OFFICER RUSHED OVER, FLINGING THE SNARLING INFANTRYMEN ASIDE.

GET BACK, BLOCKHEADS!
YOU'VE SAT AND LAUGHED
WHILE STUKAS DID THE SAME
TO THE ENEMY.

ABOUT TIME
SOME BODY WITH SOME
SENSE GOT HERE.



FLANKED BY GRIM-FACED GUARDS, THE PAIR WERE HUSTLED AWAY.

HE LEFT US.
NOLAN JUST CLEARED
OFF. OF ALL THE...

AH, STOP YOUR WHINING.
IF YOU'D OBEYED ORDERS AND
STAYED CLOSE, WE WOULDN'T
BE IN THIS FIX. BLAME YOUR-
SELF - NOT NOLAN.



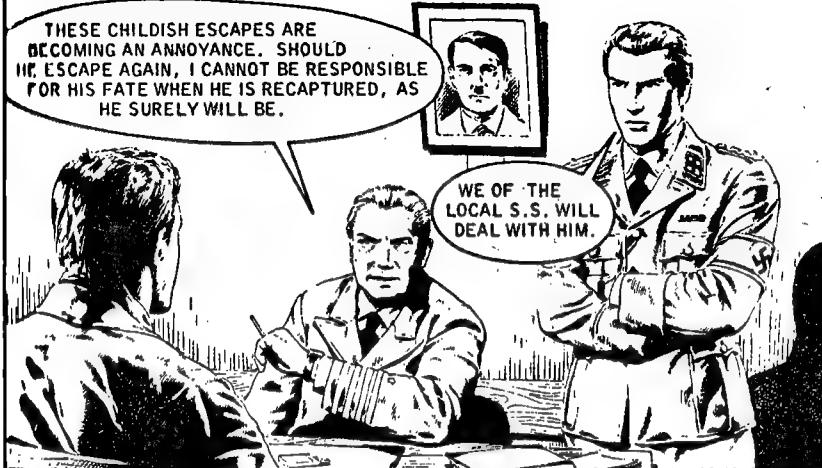
WITH THIS COLD COMFORT, RICK WAS MARCHED AWAY INTO CAPTIVITY TO BE EVENTUALLY DELIVERED TO A PRISON CAMP FOR NAVAL PRISONERS DEEP INSIDE GERMANY.



FOR NOW THERE WAS BUT ONE THOUGHT IN RICK'S MIND - ESCAPE. BUT TYPICALLY HE TRIED TO GO IT ALONE. HE EVEN MANAGED TO GET OUT OF THE CAMP A COUPLE OF TIMES, BUT WITHOUT THE RIGHT DISGUISE AND PAPERS HE WAS SOON RECAPTURED.



NICK'S LATEST ATTEMPT LED TO A STICKY INTERVIEW BETWEEN COMMANDER RIVERTON AND THE CAMP COMMANDANT.



RIVERTON MET THE S.S. OFFICER'S COLD GAZE AND SHUDDERED INWARDLY. HE WAS WAITING WHEN RICK WAS RELEASED FROM THE "COOLER".



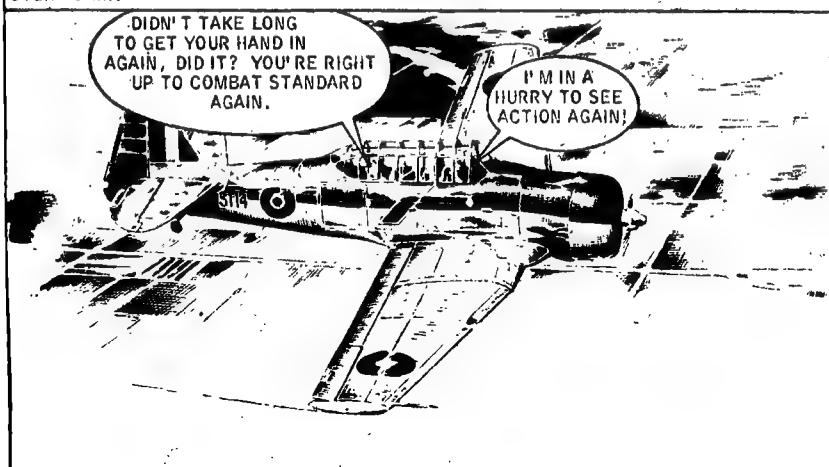
RICK HAD HAD PLENTY OF TIME TO THINK IN THE LONG HOURS OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT. HE HAD LEARNED A LOT ABOUT HIMSELF, AND HADN'T CARED FOR WHAT HE LEARNED.



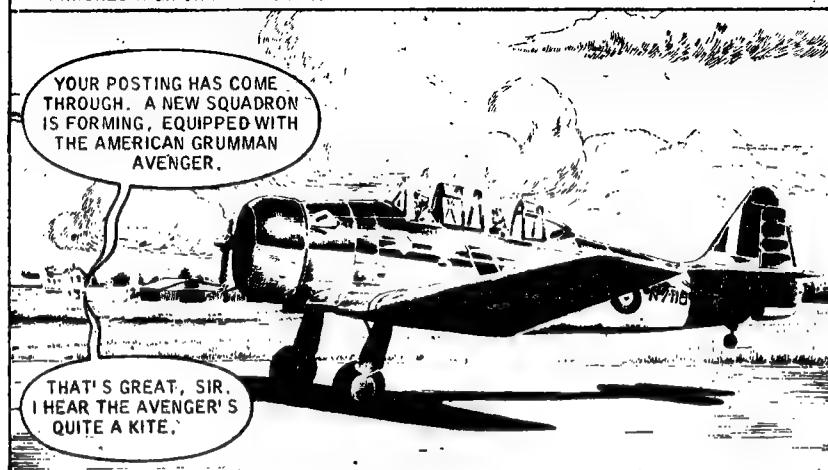
THIS TIME, PROPERLY PREPARED AND EQUIPPED, RICK WAS SUCCESSFUL. HE GOT CLEAR, AND ULTIMATELY REPORTED TO THE ADMIRALTY IN LONDON.



NEW AIRCRAFT, NEW TACTICS. FROM BEING THE LAST RESORT, THE AEROPLANE WAS NOW THE SPEARHEAD OF THE NAVY'S STRIKING POWER. RICK HAD TO LEARN HIS TRADE ALL OVER AGAIN.



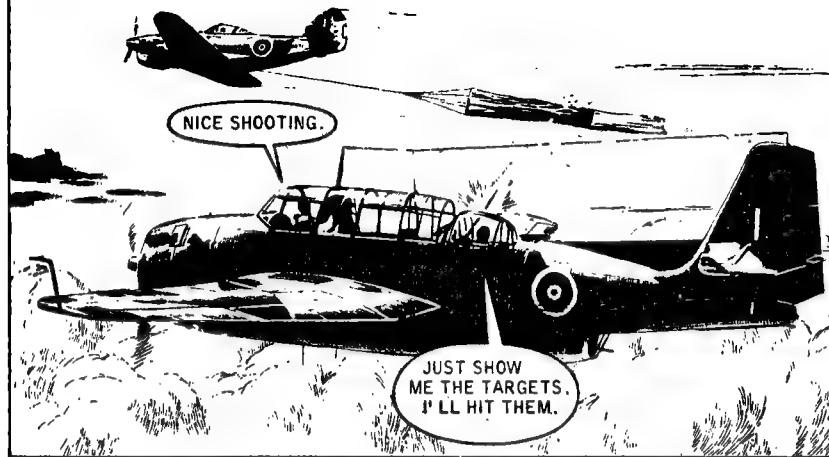
RICK WAS DELIGHTED TO FIND ALL HIS OLD SKILL RETURNING, NOW TEMPERED BY EXPERIENCE AND A COOL HEAD. TORPEDO DROPPING WAS ALL NEW TO HIM, BUT HE FINISHED HIGH ON HIS COURSE.



AT HIS NEW BASE, RICK TEAMED UP WITH A TALL, COMICAL SCOTTISH PETTY OFFICER CALLED NEIL RAE.



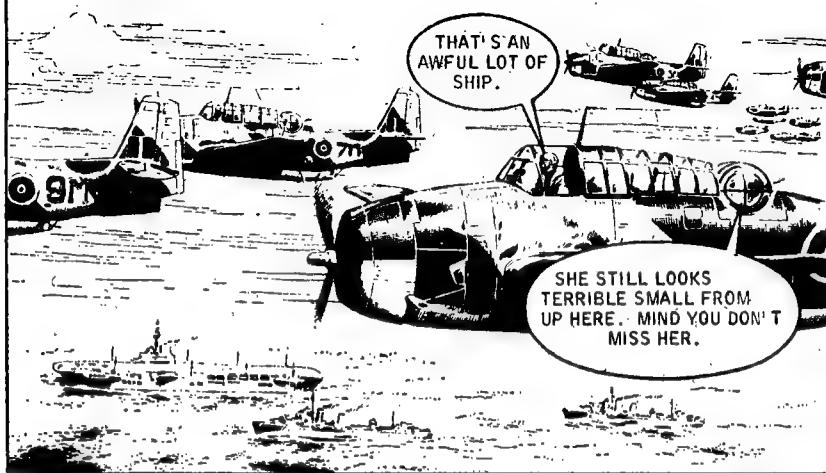
AND WHEN HE WAS BEHIND HIS GUNS, NEIL WASTED NEITHER WORDS NOR AMMUNITION.



ONCE THE SQUADRON WAS FULLY TRAINED —

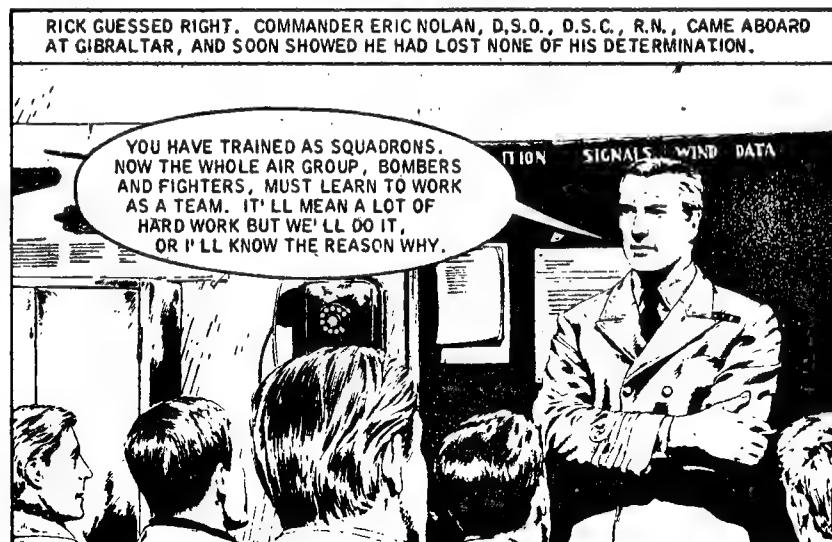
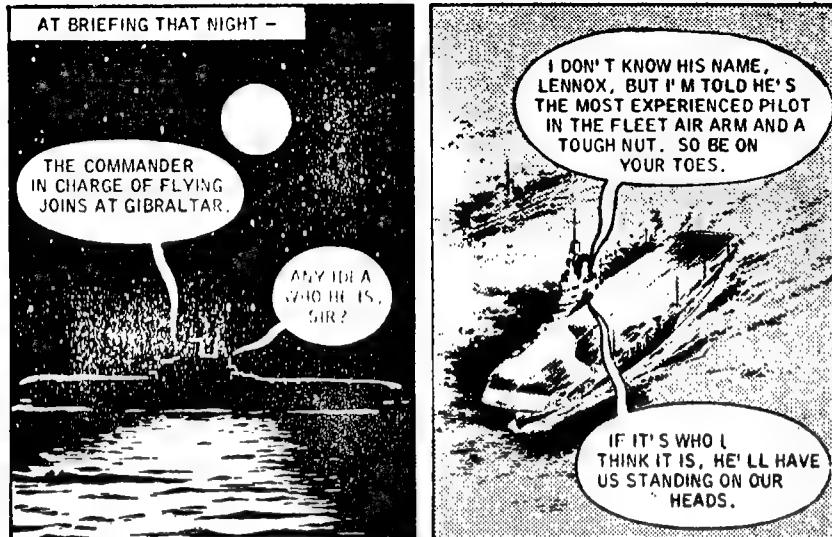


THEIR NEW SHIP WAS A FAR CRY FROM THE OLD ONE. IT WAS A HUNDRED FEET LONGER AND CARRIED FOUR TIMES AS MANY AIRCRAFT.



THEY LANDED ON SAFELY AND WERE SOON ON THE HANGAR DECK.

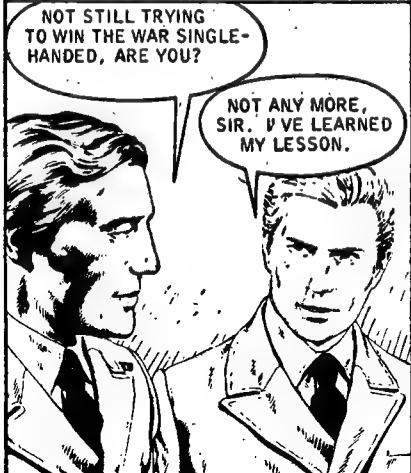




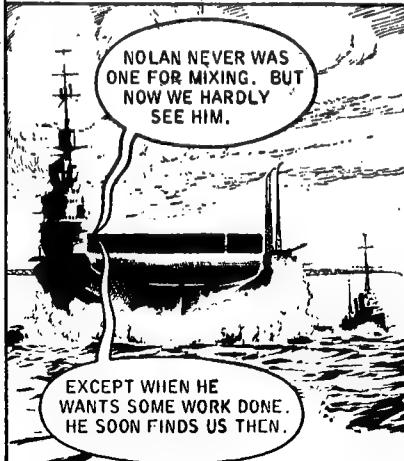
LATER THERE WAS A LESS FORMAL MEETING IN THE WARDROOM. NOLAN QUICKLY SPOTTED RICK.



NOLAN LOOKED KEENLY AT RICK AND LIKED THE CHANGED, FIRM-JAWED MAN HE SAW.



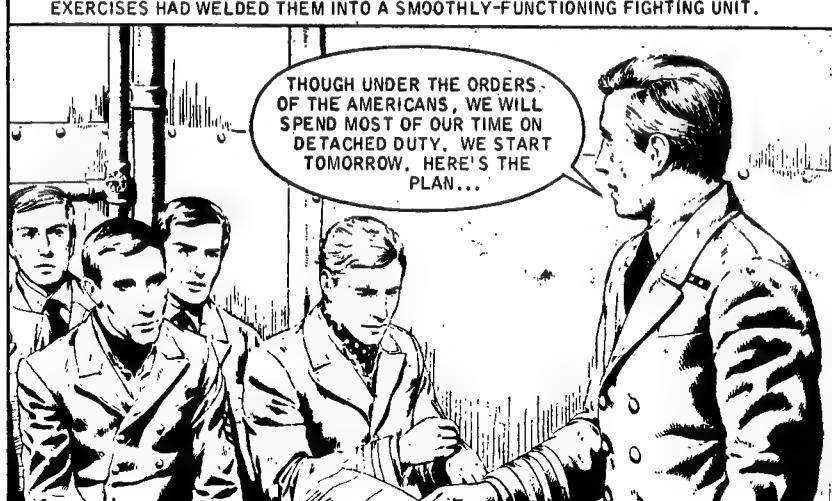
NOLAN HAD CHANGED LITTLE BUT THERE WAS ONE OTHER THING THAT RICK NOTICED AS THE VOYAGE PROGRESSSED.



THE CREWS WERE KEPT VERY BUSY.



BY THE TIME THEY JOINED UP WITH THE AMERICANS IN THE PACIFIC, THE INTENSIVE EXERCISES HAD WELDED THEM INTO A SMOOTHLY-FUNCTIONING FIGHTING UNIT.



THE PACIFIC "ISLAND-HOPPING" CAMPAIGN WAS IN FULL SWING. ANY AIRFIELD FROM WHICH THE ENEMY MIGHT INTERFERE WITH THE LANDINGS MUST BE NEUTRALISED. ONE SUCH AIRFIELD WAS THEIR FIRST TARGET.

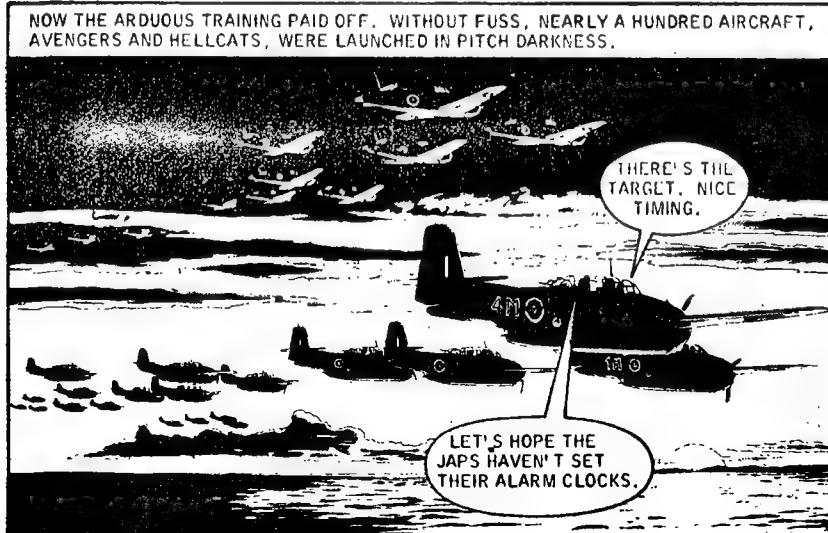
THE ATTACK IS TIMED FOR FIRST LIGHT, WHICH MEANS A NIGHT TAKE-OFF. WE SHALL ATTACK IN THREE WAVES TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE SURPRISE. EACH WAVE WILL CARPET BOMB THE AREA, TAKING THEIR CUE FROM THE WAVE LEADER.



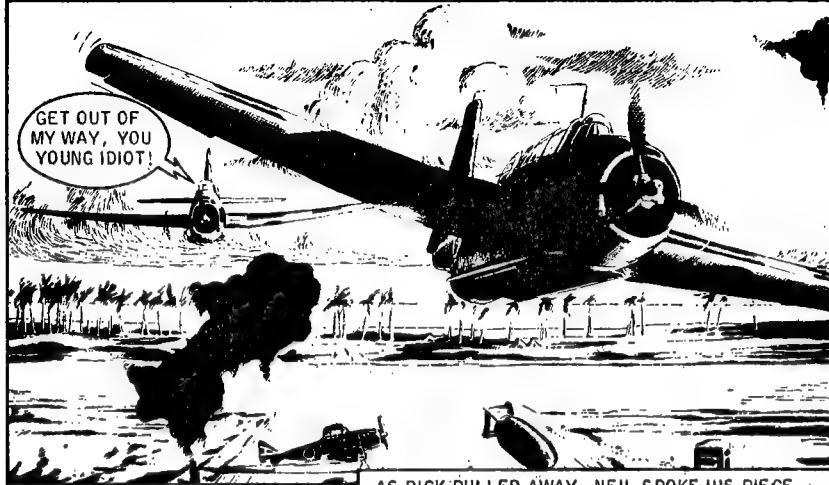
NOW THE ARDUOUS TRAINING PAID OFF. WITHOUT FUSS, NEARLY A HUNDRED AIRCRAFT, AVENGERS AND HELLCATS, WERE LAUNCHED IN PITCH DARKNESS.

THERE'S THE TARGET. NICE TIMING.

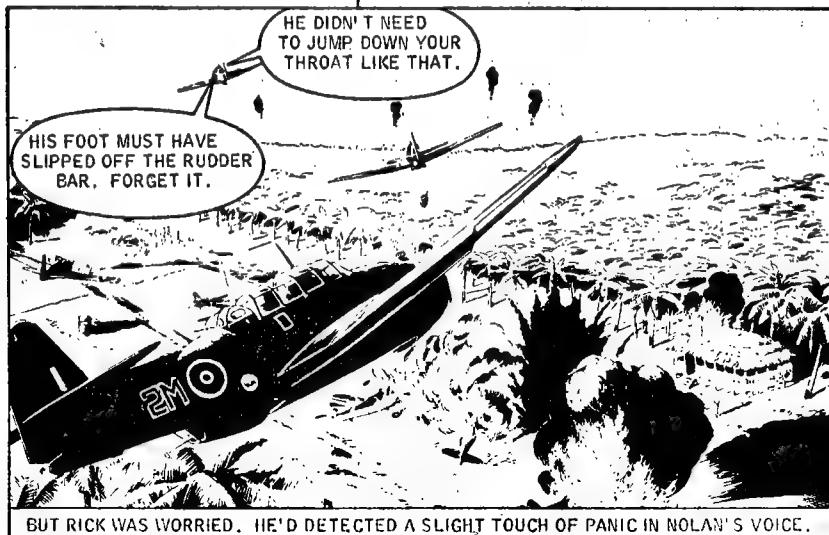
LET'S HOPE THE JAPS HAVEN'T SET THEIR ALARM CLOCKS.



THOUGH TAKEN BY SURPRISE, THE JAP ANTI-AIRCRAFT CREWS REACTED SWIFTLY.
AND RICK FOUND NOLAN FLYING TOO CLOSE TO HIM FOR COMFORT.



AS RICK PULLED AWAY, NEIL SPOKE HIS PIECE.



BUT RICK WAS WORRIED. HE'D DETECTED A SLIGHT TOUCH OF PANIC IN NOLAN'S VOICE.

SO RICK DECIDED TO WATCH THE COMMANDER CLOSELY. FOR THEIR NEXT MISSION THEY WERE TO CO-OPERATE WITH THE MAIN TASK FORCE IN A STRIKE AGAINST A JAPANESE CARRIER FORCE.



THEY TOOK OFF EAGERLY AND RICK WAS THE FIRST TO SPOT THEIR TARGET.



THE JAPANESE CARRIERS WERE HEAVILY ESCORTED. DESPITE THE STORM OF BULLETS AND SHELLS FLUNG AT THEM, NOLAN LED HIS MEN TO POINT-BLANK RANGE. RICK WAS IN THE SECOND AIRCRAFT.

TORPEDO AWAY! HANG ON TIGHT, NEIL. WE'LL HAVE TO TURN STEEPLY.



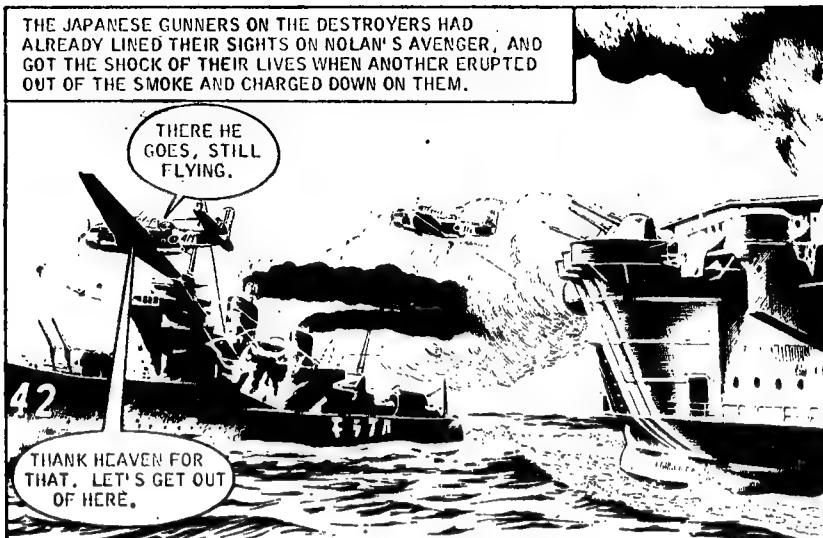
RICK HAD ALREADY STARTED HIS TURN WHEN HE SAW TO HIS HORROR THAT NOLAN WAS BORING STRAIGHT ON. HE SLAMMED HIS AVENGER ROUND, MISSING THE JAPANESE SHIP'S DECK BY INCHES.

HAVE YOU GONE BATS, TOO?

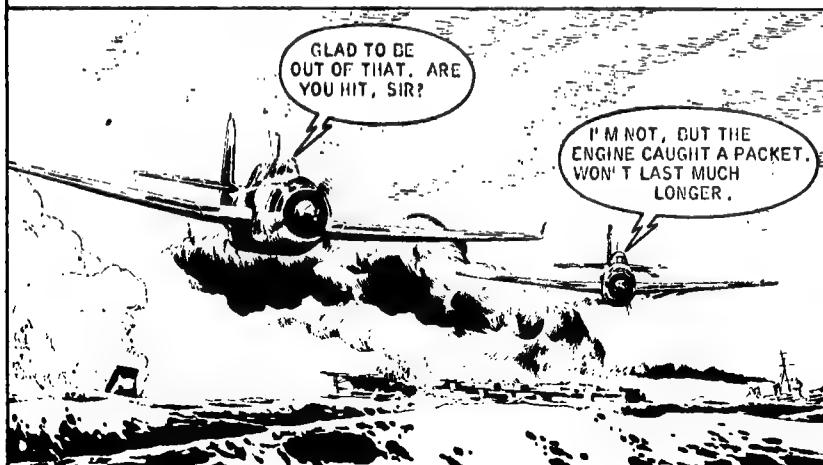
THERE'S A DESTROYER WAITING FOR HIM AT THE OTHER SIDE. WE'LL GET THERE FIRST.



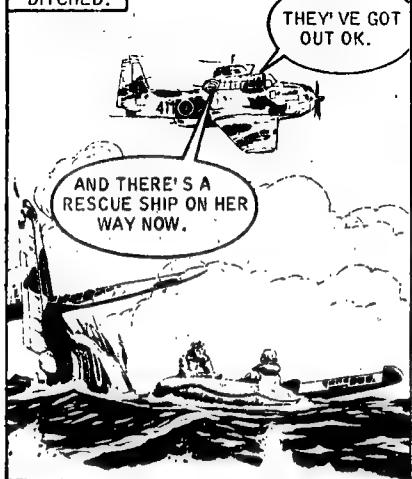
THE JAPANESE GUNNERS ON THE DESTROYERS HAD ALREADY LINED THEIR SIGHTS ON NOLAN'S AVENGER, AND GOT THE SHOCK OF THEIR LIVES WHEN ANOTHER ERUPTED OUT OF THE SMOKE AND CHARGED DOWN ON THEM.



THE TWO AVENGERS BROKE CLEAR OF THE CAULDRON OF FIRE AND STEEL, LEAVING BEHIND THEM A BURNING, SINKING JAPANESE CARRIER. THE AMERICANS HAD SIMILARLY DEALT WITH THE OTHER TWO FLAT-TOPS.



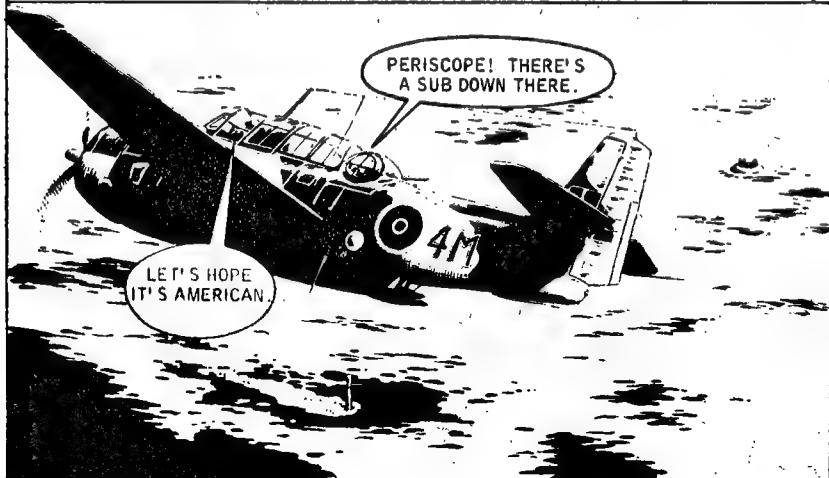
THE CRIPPLED AVENGER DROPPED LOWER AND LOWER UNTIL NOLAN SKILFULLY DITCHED.



AMERICAN DESTROYERS WERE STATIONED TO PICK UP DITCHED FLYERS. ONE WAS HEADING FULL SPEED TO THE SCENE.



WITH A LAST ENCOURAGING DIP OF HIS WING, RICK SWUNG AWAY. BUT A YELL FROM NEIL FROZE HIM IN HIS SEAT.



BUT THE LEAN, SINISTER SHAPE THAT HEAVED ITSELF TO THE SURFACE HAD THE RISING SUN OF JAPAN ON ITS CONNING TOWER. FIGURES APPEARED ON THE BRIDGE AND STARTED TO MACHINE-GUN THE DINGHY.



BUT NEIL HAD PLENTY LEFT. RICK ROARED ACROSS THE SUBMARINE'S DECK WHILE NEIL SHOWED HIS MARKSMANSHIP TO DEADLY EFFECT.



HATCHES SLAMMED, VENTS HISSED OPEN, AND THE SUBMARINE VANISHED IN A SWIRL OF FOAM. RICK HEAVED A SIGH OF RELIEF AS NOLAN AND HIS GUNNER CLIMBED TO SAFETY.



THE DARING ATTACK HAD USED UP PRECIOUS FUEL. RICK RADIOED THE CARRIER AND WHEN HE ARRIVED WITH HIS GUAGES READING EMPTY, EVERYTHING WAS IN READINESS FOR AN EMERGENCY LANDING.



AT THAT MOMENT THE ENGINE COUGHED AND DIED. DIPPING HIS NOSE SLIGHTLY TO GAIN A FRACTION OF SPEED, RICK LITERALLY HAULED THE BIG MACHINE ROUND TO SLAM ON TO THE DECK.



NOLAN ARRIVED BACK ABOARD IN THE LATE EVENING. HE SENT FOR RICK IMMEDIATELY. EXPECTING AT LEAST A WORD OF THANKS, RICK WAS TOTALLY UNPREPARED FOR THE TIRADE THAT GREETED HIM.



PERPLEXED AND HURT, RICK WENT ON TO THE NOW DARKENED FLIGHT DECK TO LET HIS RISING TEMPER COOL. A MOVEMENT CAUGHT HIS EYE LATER -



IN THE SMALL COMPARTMENT IN THE SUPER-STRUCTURE RICK FOUND NOLAN, PALE AND TREMBLING.



RICK FELT ONLY A DEEP COMPASSION. NOLAN HAD BEEN IN CONTINUOUS COMBAT FOR NEARLY FOUR YEARS WITHOUT A BREAK. NOW HE HAD REACHED THE END OF HIS TETHER.



HE NEEDED REST AWAY FROM THE HOWLING OF ENGINES, THE INSANE CHATTER OF MACHINE GUNS, THE NEVER-ENDING FEAR OF SUDDEN DEATH.

ON EVERY SORTIE IT'S HARDER TO SCREW UP NERVE TO FACE IT. AFTERWARDS, REACTION SETS IN. I HAVE TO GO TO MY CABIN AND GET A GRIP ON MYSELF BEFORE DEBRIEFING.

YOU'RE JUST TIRED.
GO AND SEE THE M.O. AND
GET HIM TO TAKE YOU
OFF FLYING.

NOLAN WOULD NOT HEAR OF THIS. HE WAS KNOWN AS A MAN OF IRON; AND HE MUST LIVE UP TO IT.

WORST OF ALL I USED YOU AS A PUNCH BAG. THAT WAS A GREAT JOB HOLDING OFF THE SUB. WHEN THAT THING POPPED UP I NEARLY CRACKED. I'M SORRY.

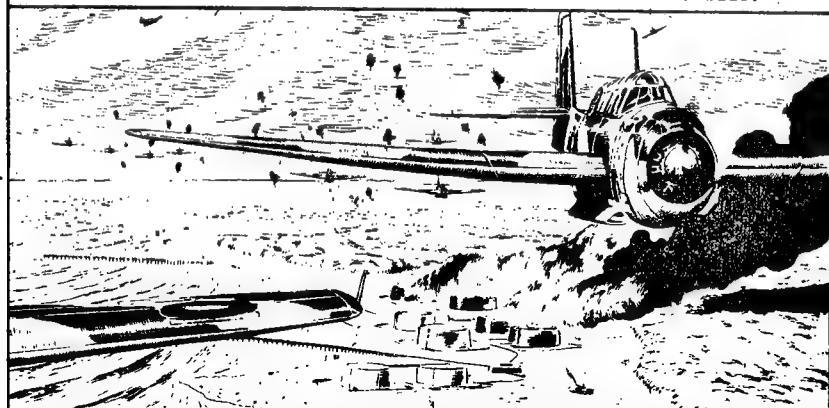
PERHAPS IF I'D MIXED WITH THE LADS A BIT MORE I'D BE OK. IT'S MY OWN FAULT. PROMISE YOU'LL KEEP QUIET ABOUT THIS?

YOU HAVE MY WORD ON THAT, SIR.

THEY WERE SHORTLY DETACHED TO CARRY OUT A STRIKE ON A JAP-HELD ISLAND, THE PRIME TARGET BEING A LARGE OIL STORAGE DEPOT. ONE OF THE AVENGER SQUADRON COMMANDERS HAD BEEN LOST IN AN EARLIER ATTACK AND NOLAN GAVE RICK THE JOB.

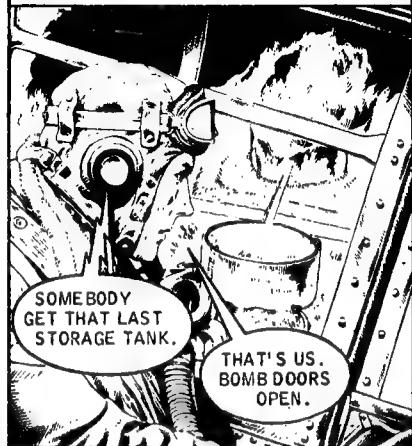


THE JAPANESE RELIED ON THIS STORAGE DEPOT, THUS IT WAS STRONGLY-DEFENDED BY FLAK AND FIGHTERS. THE HELLCAT ESCORT SPEEDILY DEALT WITH THE ZEROES, BUT THE AVENGERS HAD TO FACE A BLAZING CURTAIN OF BULLETS AND SHELLS.



THE FIRST-WAVE OF AVENGERS SHATTERED OIL TANKS AND BUILDINGS. NOLAN CLIMBED ABOVE THE MELEE AND DIRECTED FOLLOWING AIRCRAFT TO UNDAMAGED TARGETS.

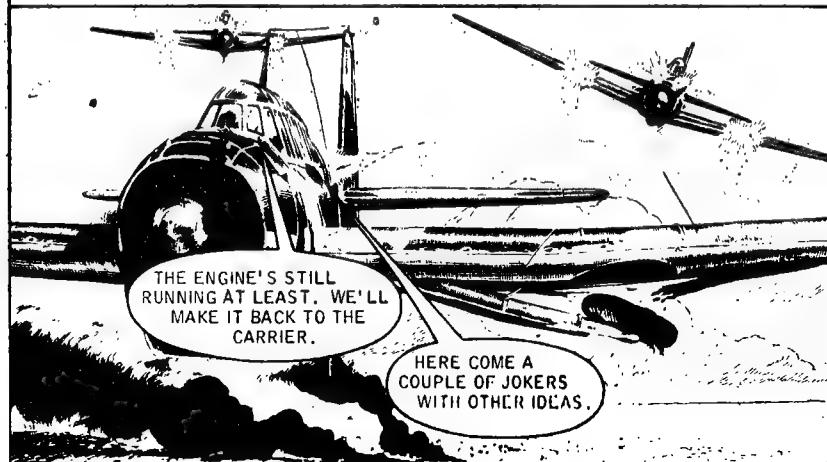
WHEN RICK LED HIS MEN INTO ATTACK, HE COULD SEE LITTLE LEFT TO BOMB. THEN NOLAN'S VOICE CRACKLED IN HIS HEADPHONES.



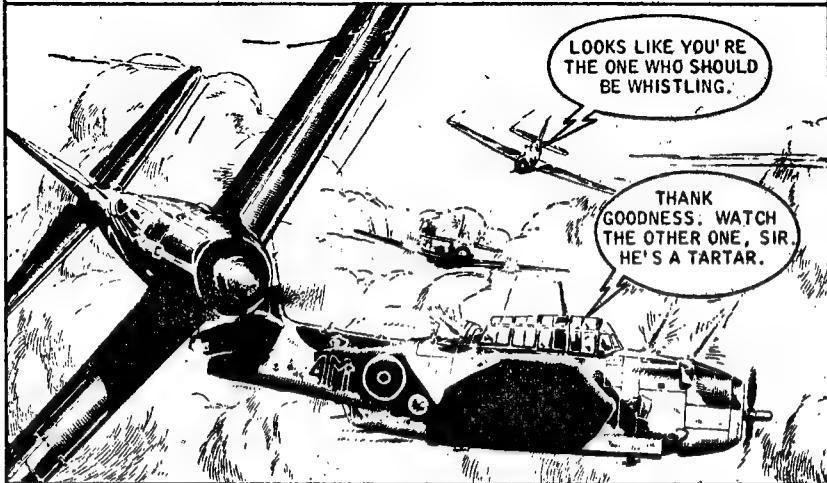
RICK WENT IN LOW. HIS BOMBS RIPPED OPEN THE GREAT TANK WHICH HAPPENED TO BE FULL OF AVIATION PETROL - AND ERUPTED LIKE A VOLCANO.



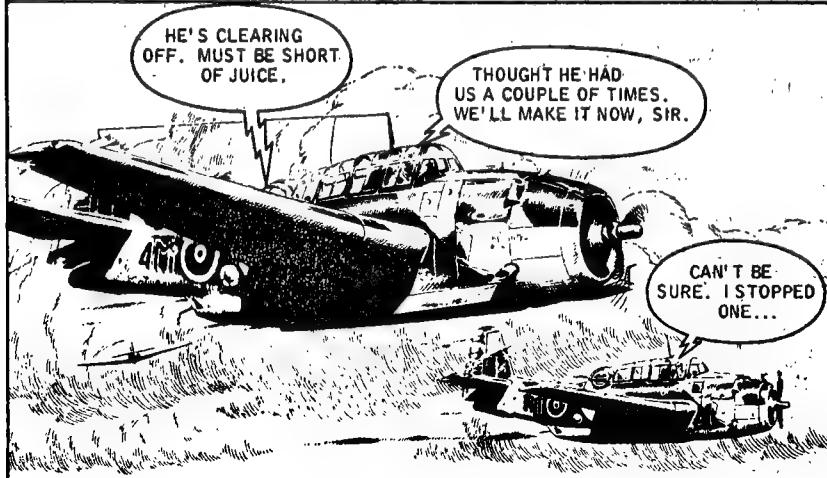
RICK FINALLY FOUGHT THE REELING AVENGER BACK ON TO AN EVEN KEEL AND SURVEYED THE DAMAGE - A LOT OF PAINT SCORCHED OFF, ONE AILERON TORN AWAY, A WHEEL HANGING HALF DOWN.



THE TWO ZEROS POUNCED GLEEFULLY ON THE LAME DUCK. NEIL DID HIS BEST, BUT THE SITUATION LOOKED HOPELESS UNTIL NOLAN INTERVENED.



NOLAN FELL IN BESIDE RICK AND THEIR TWO GUNNERS CROSSED THEIR FIRE, REPEATEDLY BEATING OFF THE SEARING ATTACKS OF THE SUPERBLY-FLOWN ZERO.



SICK AT HEART, RICK WATCHED THE OTHER AVENGER DITCH.



AS THE GUNNER HAULED NOLAN CLEAR, RICK HELD HIS COURSE. HE KNEW JUST WHAT HE WAS GOING TO DO.



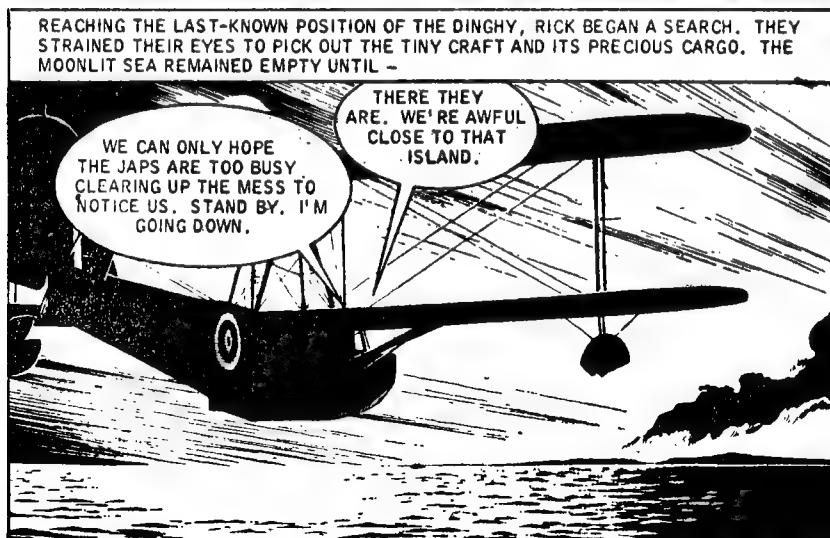
BECAUSE OF HIS DAMAGED UNDERCARRIAGE HE COULD NOT LAND ON THE CARRIER. BUT RICK DITCHED AS CLOSE TO IT AS HE COULD AND HE AND NEIL WERE SWIFTLY PICKED UP. RICK IMMEDIATELY WENT TO THE CAPTAIN TO GET PERMISSION TO FETCH NOLAN IN A WALRUS.



HE ALSO KNEW THAT JAPANESE PRISON CONDITIONS MIGHT BREAK NOLAN'S NERVES AND PUSH HIM OVER THE BRINK OF SANITY.



THE CAPTAIN RELUCTANTLY AGREED. WHILE RICK AND NEIL CHANGED INTO DRY CLOTHES, A TRUSTY OLD WALRUS AMPHIBIAN WAS BROUGHT ON DECK. WITHIN FIFTEEN MINUTES THEY WERE ON THEIR WAY.



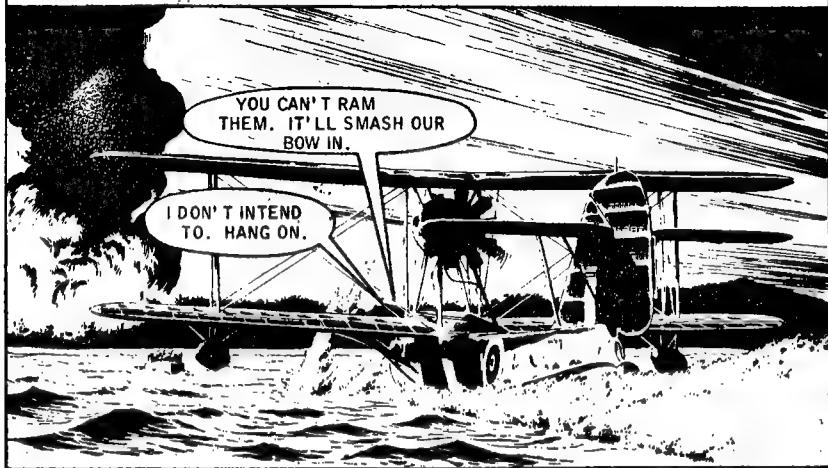
THE WALRUS CUT A GLEAMING SWATH ON THE CALM SEA. CAREFULLY RICK TAXIED UP TO THE DINGHY. NEIL THREW A LINE, AND THE RUBBER RAFT WAS DRAWN ALONGSIDE.



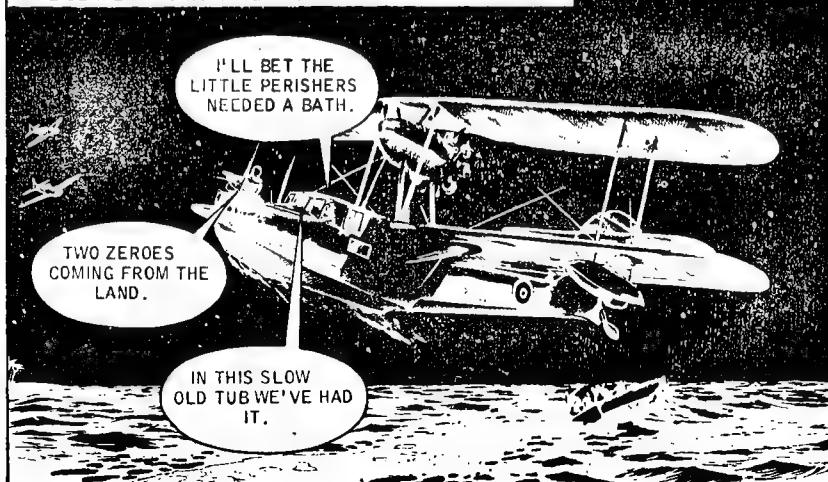
THE OLD WALRUS CARRIED ONLY TWO LEWIS GUNS FOR HER DEFENCE. NEIL CRAWLED FORWARD AND MANNED THE ONE IN THE NOSE, SPRAYING THE APPROACHING BOAT WHICH WAS PACKED WITH JAP SOLDIERS.



THE BOW HATCH HAD TO BE CLOSED FOR TAKE-OFF. AS THE WALRUS TURNED INTO WIND, THE LAUNCH CAME RACING IN AGAIN. RICK KICKED THE RUDDER AND CHARGED THE CRAFT.



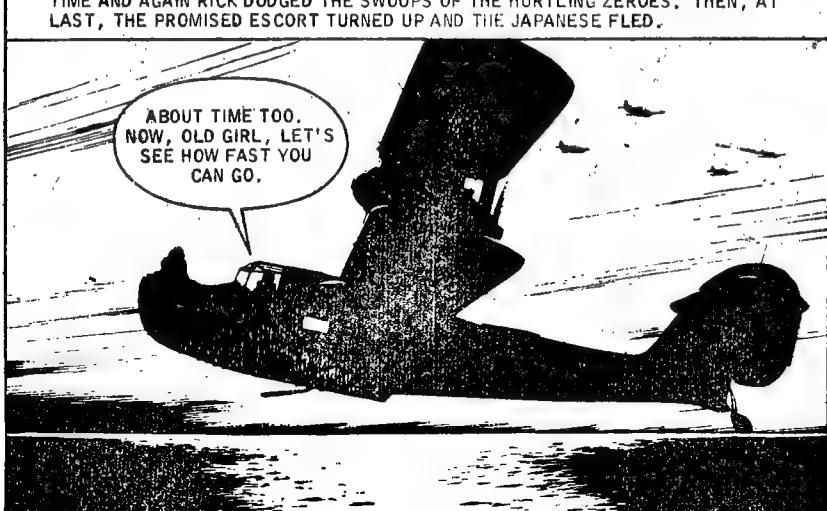
WHEN IT SEEMED AIRCRAFT AND BOAT MUST COLLIDE, RICK KICKED THE RUDDER AGAIN. THE SEAPLANE'S ROARING WASH OVERTURNED THE LAUNCH.



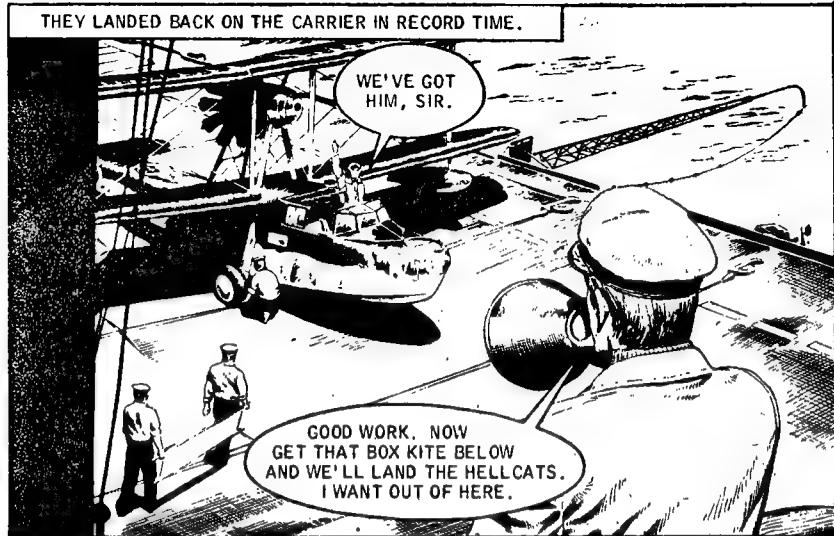
BUT THE OLD TUB'S VERY SLOWNESS WAS HER SALVATION. RICK HELD THE WALRUS CLOSE TO THE SEA, ENGINE THROTTLED BACK TO JUST MAINTAIN FLYING SPEED.



TIME AND AGAIN RICK DODGED THE SWOOPS OF THE HURTLING ZEROES. THEN, AT LAST, THE PROMISED ESCORT TURNED UP AND THE JAPANESE FLED.



THEY LANDED BACK ON THE CARRIER IN RECORD TIME.



STILL IN FLYING KIT, RICK PACED OUTSIDE THE SICK BAY. AT LAST THE MEDICAL OFFICER EMERGED.



AS SOON AS NOLAN WAS ALLOWED VISITORS HE SENT FOR RICK, NOW CONFIRMED IN HIS APPOINTMENT AS SQUADRON COMMANDER.

CONGRATULATIONS, COMMANDER.
WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENED? MY LAST RECOLLECTION WAS DRIFTING TOWARDS THE ISLAND. I'VE HEARD ALL SORTS OF FANTASTIC YARNS.

IT WAS JUST A PIECE OF TEAMWORK, SIR.
THAT'S ALL.

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Stars of Cricket—Robin Jackman

DEC 1981

SUICIDE STRIKE

THE Fleet Air Arm soon discovered how expensive it was to have Rick Lennox as one of their pilots. In his first week of combat from an aircraft carrier he had two planes shot from under him.

Rick wasn't exactly delighted about this either, so he decided it was time the enemy also had some repair bills to face — the bigger the better!

Anything that moved — on land or sea — would be fair game for Rick . . .

 Commando

